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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

September 14, 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

SUBJECT:

Soviet Brigade in Cuba

It might be useful for you to have a copy of the background briefing on Cuba that I gave today. As you can see, I skated on thin ice, but I don't think the ice cracked.

WHS

Zbigniew Brzezinski

Attachment

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR	
REVIEWED BY <u>J. L. SMITH</u>	DATE <u>8/23/85</u>
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CONFIDENTIAL BRIEFING

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

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SEPTEMBER 14, 1979

FRIDAY

THIS BRIEFING MAY BE ATTRIBUTED
TO AN ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Why don't we just talk, and you can start? I don't have any pitch to make in any formal sense.

Q I am kind of curious as to whether or not in the negotiations that are now going on there is a mandate to go beyond the Cuban troops issue to a broader Soviet-Cuban relationship around the world and all it means for us. Have we gotten to that point yet, or are we still talking about the immediate issue of the brigade?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. We are talking about the brigade.

Q Do you have plans to go beyond?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The other issue is a larger issue, and it pertains to the overall U.S.-Soviet relationship, nor is it a new issue. It has been raised by the President in Vienna. It has been raised in public statements by the Secretary of State, by myself, and by others.

It is going to be with us for some time. It is not the kind of an issue which is resolved through one or two talks or for that matter, even through a very formal arrangement. To the extent that an issue of that sort can be resolved, it is more likely to be resolved through gradual adjustment in patterns of national behavior, through gradual adjustment in outlooks. It requires discussions, consultations, but also responses. I said when I was briefing the out-of-town editors a week or two ago on the record that we need to do three things: ratify SALT, do more in defense, and compete more assertively. Therefore, I don't think at this stage to try to deal with this more complex problem of our respective national attitudes toward local change, turbulence, post-colonial instabilities would be constructive because it would simply make the specific problem which is a problem unmanageable.

Q Has the President and the Administration yet decided from the United States' standpoint what would be an acceptable resolution of this, or is it still in the stage where you don't know yet what you are going to be able to decide because you don't know what your possibilities are?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I would say we have some general notions of what ought to be a mutually satisfactory outcome, but there is still a number of uncertainties which need to be resolved through discussion with the Soviets. We are not in the process of presenting to them any formal proposal, but we are discussing both the nature of the problem and the nature of possible solutions.

I don't want at this stage to talk too much about the negotiating process, as such, because all of you, being highly experienced guys, know that you do not make negotiations easier by publicly discussing both the substance or even the character of the negotiations. We want this problem to be resolved on a mutually satisfactory basis, on the principle of reciprocity in international affairs, particularly in regards to respect for our respective special sensitivities and concerns, and we expect that a mutually satisfactory outcome can be contrived, and we feel we have a right to expect that.

Q I am interested in, if possible, the history --

Q Before you go into that, we expect in reciprocity in your statement here and also in the President's comment to that point, it sounds like you know you have some leverage on the Soviets; that is, if they don't respect our sensitivities, they won't respect theirs. Can you give us some idea of your thinking on that?

~~ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL:~~ No. I really can't, and the reason I can't is the ones that I have mentioned already. We are in the midst of negotiations and I don't think it is helpful to respond to you directly on this issue because it would simply complicate the negotiating process and a country as large as the Soviet Union, as involved in the world affairs as the Soviet Union, has also concerns and sensitivities, just as we do.

It has a right to expect from others that those sensitivities be respected and we try as best we can to respect them. By the same token, we feel, as the President said, that they should not ignore our special interests and concerns. It is precisely because of this reality that we feel that this issue is amenable to constructive resolution through accommodation.

I don't think at this stage the hinting of this or that response or characterizing it would be helpful. I think really it would be more difficult for everybody to negotiate in a reasonable manner.

Q I had to try.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. I know. I had to respond the way I do.

Q You are using the term "negotiations" and Hodding Carter was using it yesterday but "negotiations" implies that both sides see a need to adjust a position. Have the Soviets in fact accepted that? When they opened these talks with Dobrynin, did that imply that they were willing to make some movement and have they indicated that in the rounds so far?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I really don't want to, nor should I characterize the Soviet willingness.

Q "Negotiations" is the proper word?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It is the proper word as far as I am concerned, in the sense that the Secretary of State and the Soviet Ambassador are engaged in the discussion of an issue which we feel has to be resolved on the basis other than the status quo.

Q In other words, the Soviets have accepted the idea of the status quo will and can be changed?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I am not going to characterize what the Soviet position is. I am saying that there can be negotiations when one or the other party engages the other in a discussion of an issue which is of importance to it. I am not predicting the negotiations will succeed, though I am expressing confidence that precisely because we both have interests, we both have a stake in the good relationship with each other, we are both interested in SALT moving forward, there is the basis from which to move towards a resolution.

Q I am interested in the management of this from the point of view of the decision that was made to make a public statement that we will not be satisfied with the status quo.

If I recall correctly, in the first statement by the State Department, there was no such assertion, but Secretary Vance escalated that in his news conference.

In the light of the fact that it seems at least possible from the outside that you will not be able to change the status quo or may not be able to do so, I am interested in how that decision was made and why. Why did you put yourself in the position? I know there is a premise behind my question. I concede that. Why did you put yourself in the position of publicly demanding something that it will now appear you may not be able to get?

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICIAL: Because the issue involved is one of importance to us; namely, the presence of a surreptitiously-stationed combat formation in the Western Hemisphere, close to our borders in a country that is actively engaged in the promotion of military action often directed at either our friends or at our interests. This is almost verbatim, what the President said. Given that fact, the Secretary of State felt, and others endorsed his position, that the importance of this issue ought to be reiterated, or ought to be acknowledged and reiterated. When you say that something is not acceptable, it doesn't mean necessarily that you are going to get it resolved unilaterally on the basis of your preference.

It is conceivable that some issues are not subject to resolution, but that doesn't mean that you should not acknowledge the fact that it is still unacceptable. If it is not resolved constructively, obviously it will remain an issue in American-Soviet relations. If it remains an issue in American-Soviet relations, it could generate other consequences which neither of us desire.

One issue, one possible consequence has already been generated; namely, growing impediments to SALT. Our position is that we don't wish to jeopardize SALT. We assume the Soviets don't either. There could be other consequences. I will not predict what they might be. The point is that we cannot shy away from acknowledging the reality, even if we are not sure that it can be shaped entirely to our satisfaction. If it isn't shaped to our satisfaction, these other negative consequences may thereby be generated by their own momentum. This is something we should take into account; this is something the Soviets should take into account.

The President also alluded to the fact that we have shown respect for their concerns. We want to continue showing that respect and we would like them to help us.

Q How have we shown concern?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We have shown concern by not being deliberately insensitive to their concerns.

Q Where?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't want to do that because if I do that, I will answer the earlier question, which I did not want to do.

Q You don't say in the context of this immediate case, you are talking about some other matters elsewhere?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think I am prepared to say that more generally we have tried to be respectful of Soviet concerns because we believe that stable relationships with the Soviet Union require that they be respectful of ours and we of theirs. We feel that in Cuba the presence of a combat medium-sized formation shows ~~the~~ degree of insensitivity to our concerns which needs to be remedied. We hope that through discussions with the Soviets they will reach the same conclusion and therefore in a mutually satisfactory manner the problem can be resolved.

Q But you say that one of the --

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I cannot predict it will be. I expect and hope that it will be. If it isn't, as I have said earlier, then certain negative consequences not of our own design may follow such as the negative impact on SALT, which a number of Senators have already postulated. We may want to also revise some of the conclusions we have drawn about the relationship. These are the things we want to take into account. We feel they are taken into account and therefore we expect the issue can be constructively resolved.

Q The negative consequence on SALT is something that you have fought.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Let me just sign something.

(Discussion off the record.)

Have these things been drawn to the attention of the Russians, how our overall relationship would be affected by the failure to solve this problem? From the outset we said that, that our overall relation -- or the Secretary said it, I think.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The President has done this in his public statement and I think the Soviets are aware of the public statement and again it seems to me that at this sensitive stage in the discussions with the Soviets or the negotiations, there is no need to go further than that. The Soviets very well know that the American-Soviet relationship is a complex one which, as I have often said in this room, involves both cooperation and competition. And how this

issue is resolved will doubtless affect that relationship to some degree.

We don't want to overemphasize the issue. We don't want to make it the litmus test of the overall relationship, but at the same time, we would be escaping from reality not to recognize the fact that in some fashion the relationship will be affected by whether this issue is positively resolved or if it is not.

Q You are suggesting it has only tacitly been drawn to their attention through public statements?

ADMINISTRATIONS OFFICIAL: I would say adequately. In my briefing to the out-of-town editors, I said we need to do three things, ratify SALT, do more in defense, compete more assertively. We need to do all three things. We want to ratify SALT because that produces greater stability in the nuclear relationship, and it stands on its own feet. We need to do more in defense, because there are certainly requirements which need to be met, and we need to compete.

The scope of that competition is certainly going to be defined in some measure by what the Soviets do in general, as well as in this particular case.

Q More competing than we are doing now? Is something different than the last two-and-a-half years in competition?

ADMINISTRATIONS OFFICIAL: Again I think it depends on what the Soviets do. You can have ideological competition or you can have competition in making the life of one or the other side less comfortable in some areas — sensitivity to it.

Q Yes, but you do see a more active role of competition coming up now than we had earlier in this Administration?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't think we want to guarantee that for its own sake, and I think it is important that both sides minimize those areas of friction or disagreement which are likely to generate more competition. The world is turbulent enough without U.S.-Soviet competition intensifying it, but it is very important both for Washington and for their side to realize that minimizing and containing that competition requires reciprocal restraint.

This is why we are concerned about the brigade in Cuba. We did not think that this shows adequate recognition that this is a very sensitive problem for us. We hope that the Soviets would recognize it, and we can resolve this constructively.

Q Did they accept — two parts of what is really the same question. One, do they accept our version of the facts —

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Do they accept our version of what?

Q Of the facts? In other words, we made certain public assertions here about combat troops, combat brigade. Do they accept our — this obviously is from our own intelligence — do they accept our version of the facts, and do they accept that we have at this point, that we have entered into these discussions in good faith, or have you found a reflection in their position that they think we may be playing games, or as has been suggested, maneuvers?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't want to comment on the first part of your question because that would necessarily get into the disclosing of what they are saying to us, and I really feel for reasons that I mentioned that I should preserve the confidentiality of these talks.

The context in which these talks can be productive is that of confidentiality, and I think we all need to respect that. I certainly have to do it. I think you guys who are experienced fellows know why I have to do it. I think the readers ought to realize also that it simply isn't helpful at this stage to be either disclosing our position or characterizing the Soviet position. As far as whether the Soviets think we are acting in good faith, while it may be presumptuous for me to make judgments as to what they think our attitude is, my guess is, my guess is, that they realize that when the President speaks as he did, and when the Secretary of State engages in these discussions for the number of hours now with Ambassador Dobrynin that they do so because the matter is of great concern to us. And they also must note that the President was very deliberate in trying to put this problem in perspective, not fanning national emotions, but trying to indicate why the issue is serious, but at the same time different from some previous historical experiences with which it tends to be a little too cavalierly compared.

I think the Soviets must know this.

Q In the meantime you all are getting beaten around the head and shoulders by a lot of political commentators and some United States Senators, and there is a process under way at the Capitol which is the mix, part of the mix which is, to say the least, not helpful to the desire to get across the Treaty on Strategic Weapons.

Do you have any even ballpark guess how long this process is going to last, and how long you will have to take this pounding before you have a chance of coming up with something to have a favorable result?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I honestly cannot give you any specific time frame even as a guess. We recognize that it is in everybody's interest to deal with this problem in an expeditious fashion. We recognize that this is a problem which is susceptible to being highly emotionalized. I hope it is not too self-serving to say that we have not demagogued on the subject. We tried to act responsibly on it. We have tried to deal with it in a manner that permits serious discussions with the Soviets without at the same time either conveying to the public a sense of underestimating ^{its} importance, nor trying simply to appeal to public anxieties and emotions.

We're trying to walk a thin line, and it is not easy, and you are right. We are getting pounded, but we think that the circumstances require us to deal with this problem in a manner that permits the serious discussion with the Soviets. We want to resolve this problem with the Soviets.

Q Do you think it is likely you will be able to do it before Gromyko comes over to the US?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: When is he coming?

Q I gather it is going to be the last week of this month or the first week of next month.

Q About two weeks from now.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Is it as late as that? I thought it was earlier.

Q The first week; the big week is the last week of this month.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: There is simply no way of predicting this. There is simply no way I can predict it. It is not only -- well, it really depends very much on the Soviets. We know the status quo is not acceptable. We have some generalized notions of the directions to which both of us ought to be pointed, but we also need to know more. Any solution to this that is acceptable to us and to them needs to be discussed with some detail. I have no way of predicting how long it will take. I do think that it is both in our interest and the Soviets to move expeditiously before the issue becomes more charged with public emotions.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He has got another meeting.

Q I don't understand why it isn't acceptable to us. It doesn't threaten anybody. They can't invade Miami. The Monroe Doctrine really, the case has been made by the Administration, you have made here as yet, did to the editors a kind of a valid case, I think you are the only one that has done so publicly, that this represents a totally unacceptable condition.

I don't think the public — I can't find anything that represents a strong case for why it simply can't be accepted except a political case that it excites some people in the Senate.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think there are certain aspects of this which are seriously troublesome insofar as the relationship is concerned. In international affairs there is a whole range of gradations for actions which one side may find difficult to live with, those which give you concern. There are those which give you great concern. There are those which threaten the national interest. There are those which are even belligerent acts.

What concerns us in this particular case is the fact that there is a combat unit by the Soviet Union in a country very close to us, stationed in circumstances unbeknownst to us, and perhaps even with a degree of deliberate camouflage, and in a country which has become increasingly active in the direct use of the military forces abroad on behalf of foreign objectives which it shares in common with the Soviet Union, and which in some instances directly and in some instances are indirectly aimed at us.

It is this conjunction of elements which is deeply troublesome to us, and I am sure that if the United States were to have done the same and become suddenly known to the Soviet Union, and particularly who were to be in some area which because of historical reasons has become especially sensitive to the Soviets, the Soviets would be deeply troubled.

Q Such as putting troops into Iran?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That would be an example, I suppose, but there could be some others.

Would this be an example of our — if you can accept my word, restrain in the past, our showing of concern for their sensibilities?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I really don't want to do that because you are coming back to what we talked about earlier.

Q What about in just theory, that it has been studied, that this may be a training under it, demonstration under it? You saw, I am sure, the stories of several days ago along these lines.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: What is at issue is not what

the different functions of this unit may be or might have been, but the combat capability as an organized formation with headquarters, equipment, and so forth.

We have operated on the assumption which we have no reason to question until recently that the Soviet Union had training personnel in Cuba. But the presence of a medium-sized combat formation which engages in its own exercises and is capable of undertaking combat and in a country which has become much more active in using its troops abroad is what is generally troublesome to us.

Q You say it is not size, but capabilities of this unit that disturbs you?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It is a combat capability that disturbs us.

Q Not the mission to which it is assigned?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The mission we do not know precisely what it is. I do not exclude the possibility that at one time or another even this unit and certain Soviet military personnel may have been engaged in training and we have assumed throughout that the Soviet military personnel are engaged in training Cubans. What has come to us as a new development and a disturbing one is the existence of a combat unit with a combat capability engaging in combat exercises. This raises the question as to what is its mission, political or military especially given this somewhat more active role of Cuba as well as the acquisition by Cuba of power projection military capability.

You say why is this unacceptable to us? Remember what the word "unacceptable" means. It means that this is a serious complication in international affairs. It is not a crisis, but it is a serious complication which if it isn't constructively resolved is likely to have some adverse impact on the U.S.-Soviet relationship, something which we do not desire, something which we feel the Soviets should not desire. Therefore, we feel that we should resolve it.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Can we wrap this up with one more question?

Q Suddenly it started raining hard and you throw us out. (Laughter)

Q It was reported in a news magazine over this weekend or past weekend that in addition to these talks there has been one message so far from Mr. Gromyko, probably sent here to the White House or to the Secretary. Is that correct, and have there been other around the circuit things going on in addition to the talks between Vance and Dobrynin?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Again, Don, let me to some extent answer you in part but truthfully that the negotiating relationship is the relationship between the Secretary of State and Ambassador Dobrynin and that is the negotiating relationship. On an issue of this sort there can be at one time or another different messages passed at lower levels or sort of parallel channels, but nothing of major importance has transpired. The negotiating, the central negotiating relationship and the exclusive negotiating relationship is the relationship in which Secretary Vance is engaged.

Q You have suggested in the answer to the previous question something that seems to me suggests the possibility of a very complicated problem. You said, and I think I heard you, that you don't exclude the possibility that this same unit may have engaged in training exercises.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: At one time or another.

Q So you have got a situation where you found the unit involved in combat maneuvers at one point, and

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Or alternatively, this unit may have been some time ago or even years ago engaged primarily in training.

Q Okay. But that suggests to me the possibility that if you can simply extract from the Soviets a commitment that its functions would be limited to training, we wouldn't have any objection to that.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't want to characterize what we could live with within any degree of specificity. What is of concern to us is the presence in Cuba of the retrained Soviet combat formation with a combat capability. We feel that status quo has to be altered and of course the clearer the resolution the more acceptable it will be to the American people and the better for the American-Soviet relationship.

Q With due respect the sensitivity and not giving away anything that is going to make the negotiations any tougher just ends up with us repeating ourselves as we have been doing for a week.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Tough.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: One has to decide whether it is more important to resolve the complicated international issue or to make news. Listen, I would much rather give you something which would make you feel when walking out of here that it was of great value and how much "I got out of this".

Q Don't be too shy like that.

Q It is not like we have photos to print for our readers that we can show is there. That would be more worthwhile.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I honestly don't think that the problem is that your readers doubt the presence of a Soviet combat formation in Cuba. The problem is more likely to be what kind of emotions can be generated in a climate which is susceptible to demagogic and extreme statements.

— We want to resolve this problem. We don't want to make the Soviets feel it is not important, but at the same time we are confronting an administration to the degree that the problem is unresolvable. This is a difficult problem to be faced. You guys can help us a lot on this not because you want to help us, because we are all in the same boat. My God, we live in the same country. You shape public attitudes and how you interpret this to the country is probably as important as anything else that is happening these days.

I don't underestimate the importance of this. I think it is important. It is important as a specific problem. It is important in a more generalized sense because after all we are trying to stabilize a very complicated relationship in a very turbulent world. That is a long process.

C Senator Baker's deadline has just about run out

Q It is tempting?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Maybe a blockade will suffice.
(Laughter)

Q Who won in 1962 anyway? Who won in the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 anyway?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The groundrules are for attribution to "Administration Officials".

Q "Senior?"

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, "Administration Official".
We want this to be calm.

Q Does the evidence look like now this thing has been there since 1962?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. I don't think the evidence now indicates that this unit has been there. I think there are some grounds, really firm grounds, for believing military personnel has been in Cuba throughout those years. Organized formation? No, we don't have any evidence it has been there continuing since 1962. That is one of the things of how can you prove the negative?
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Q There is a suggestion that since the Cubans have been getting good experience in Africa that maybe the Soviets are there to be trained by the Cubans since the Soviets haven't had any experience with them.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That I haven't seen. (Laughter)
I have seen another suggestion which is purely speculative and it is this: That this brigade size Soviet formation which is a combat formation may initially have been involved in training Cuban formations of the same type that they then sent abroad because the Cuban formations in Angola and Ethiopia are organized on a brigade basis which is not usual.

Q But to relook at the intelligence since this became public has it significantly altered your view of what is there?

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Of what there is right now?

Q Yes.

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No.

THE PRESS: Thank you.